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Matter of Fact By Stewart Alsop

The Dulles White Paper

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IT IS not the usual function of a political reporter to review books, but occasionally a book comes along which is also important news. Such a book is "John Foster Dulles: A Biography," by John Robinson, published in the magazine.



The book is news for two reasons. First, it contains a Stewart Alsop fascinating account of what had previously been only rumored or suspected—a calculated decision by Secretary Dulles to force a showdown in the Middle East. The account of this startling episode is undoubtedly based on interviews with Dulles himself. Second, the book will no doubt have important international repercussions, since it not only opens all the old half-healed wounds caused by the Suez crisis, but also pours great dollops of salt in them.

The Beal book is thus likely to cause as much uproar as the account based on an interview with Dulles of the Dulles "Brink of War" theory, by another Time man, James Shepley.

In his introduction Beal, while absolving Dulles of responsibility for the book, states that "it benefits from personal interviews with him which provided insight into his official actions, for which I thank him."

REPEATEDLY, Beal describes Dulles' views with an authority which could only have come from such "personal interviews." The book will certainly be regarded, therefore, as a kind of personal Dulles white paper on

his Middle East policies, unofficial but authentic.

Beal confidently describes the manner of Dulles' withdrawal of the American offer of aid to Egypt in building the Aswan Dam as a calculated slap in the face for Egypt's President Nasser, consciously designed to bring on a showdown. The Beal account should be read in full, since it is an authoritative report of one of the most amazing exercises in diplomacy in recent history. But the following excerpts give the gist:

"For Dulles, a moment of cold-war climax had come. It was necessary to call Russia's hand in the game of economic competition. It was necessary to make the demonstration on a grand scale. Nasser combined the right timing, the right geography and the right order of magnitude for a truly major gambit in the cold war. Why did (Dulles) turn down Nasser so brutally, without a chance to save face? Since the issue involved more than simply denying Nasser money for a dam, a polite and concealed rebuff would fail to make the really important point. It had to be forthright, carrying its own built-in moral for neutrals in a way that the ormolu of applied propaganda would not cheapen."

IN SHORT, Dulles withdrew the American offer as insultingly as possible, not in a moment of temporary aberration, as many thought at the time, but because he planned it that way.

Beal's version of the Dulles decision to force a showdown parallels almost word for word the version of the decision previously offered by still another Time-Life man and Dulles adviser, former

presidential adviser C. D. Jackson.

When the Jackson version of the Dulles decision was made public, it was widely assumed that it was in fact the Dulles version. Now there can be no reasonable doubt of it—an experienced reporter like Beal could not conceivably describe the Secretary of State's reasoning and motivation in such authoritative detail simply by guesswork.

Beal makes it clear, moreover, that Dulles was aware of the dangers involved in forcing a showdown: "As a calculated risk the decision was on a grand scale, comparable in the sphere of diplomacy to the calculated risks of war in Korea and Formosa. But his experience at sailing in diplomatic waters convinced him that the breeze would be better if he took a new and independent tack."

THE CHAPTERS which follow, which also clearly benefit from "insight into his official actions," are designed to prove that the Dulles decision to force a showdown was a brilliantly successful diplomatic coup. This proves a trifle difficult, even for so able an advocate as Beal, since it is uncomfortably obvious that the Middle Eastern "breeze" has not been better, but a great deal worse since Dulles forced his showdown.

The difficulty is overcome by the simple device of blaming everything that has gone wrong on our allies—while the Dulles policy was "moral," and "consistent and purposeful," our allies' policies were both stupid and dishonest. This theory of the crisis, which deserves further examination, will be studied with pained attention abroad, in view of the authority with which the author clearly speaks.

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